

6. ON THE OCCURRENCE OF *GYPVS FVLVVS* AND *AEQYPIVS MONACHVS* IN THE GIR FOREST

The known range of the Fulvous Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus* (Hablizl) within the limits of the Indian subcontinent is Pakistan and northern Gujarat, although stragglers have been recorded east to western Assam, and south to Bombay (once). It has been known to be a regular winter visitor only as far south as Kutch and northern Gujarat (Sálim Ali & S. D. Ripley 1968).

However, during my field study of vulture in the Gir forest (21°6' N., 70°46' E.) for two years from 1970 to 1972 I found this species a common bird in the whole of the Gir forest during winter. From November to March this vulture constituted approximately five per cent of the total individuals of *Gyps* vultures observed at carcasses. The other species were the Longbilled Vulture (*Gyps indicus*) and the Indian Whitebacked Vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*).

During their stay at Gir the fulvous griffon used the cliffs of Charakio Hill which is the highest in the Gir, for roosting and resting. Continuous usage has left droppings that gave a white-washed appearance to the broad face of these cliffs which could be seen from a long distance. The name *Charakio* has been derived from the Gujarati word *charak* which means bird droppings. Fulvous griffon were also found roosting on the cliffs of the Girnar Hills, about 40 km north of the Gir, along with *Gyps indicus* which also breed there. In addition to roosting on cliffs the fulvous griffon spent nights on trees with other vultures near carcasses, to enable feeding early next morning. One such bird was caught at night with the aid of a search light and was used for captive experiments. A specimen (Reg. No. 23524) has been deposited in the bird collection of the Bombay Natural History Society.

Another species of vulture which was recorded for the first time in the Gir forest, although within its known range, is the Cinereous Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*). On 3 March 1972 at 1340 hrs a single bird came to feed off the remnants of a dead buffalo beside Hiran river at Karam-na-Dadea ness in the western Gir. It approached a King Vulture (*Torgos calvus*) which was feeding on the hard tissues of a limb, chased it aside and started pulling at the limb. This bird was similar in general appearance to the king vulture but bigger, had pinkish white legs and head, and had no lappets. Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) has observed this bird as a rare winter visitor in other parts of the Kathiawar Peninsula, namely, Bhavnagar, Dhrangadhra, and the Girnar.

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SHAHID BHAGAT SINGH ROAD,
BOMBAY-1,
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ROBERT B. GRUBH

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7. CALCIUM INTAKE IN VULTURES OF THE GENUS *GYP*S

Vultures grouped under the genus *Gyps* were known to feed only on meat and other soft tissues of carcasses and not on bones, and therefore their mode of calcium intake, required to build up bones, had always been a mystery.

During one of my observations on vultures at Gir Forest I came across the following incident. In the western Gir, close to Sasan village, about ninety-five Whitebacked (*Gyps bengalensis*), seven Longbilled (*Gyps indicus*), four Griffon (*Gyps fulvus*), and three King (*Torgos calvus*) vultures were feeding off the skinned carcass of an ox on 23rd January 1972 at 1245 hrs. Soon a few vultures with bulging crops emerged from the squabbling flock, walked about twenty feet aside, and started picking up and swallowing pieces of old, dry bones including ribs of small animals and chopped up pieces of skull. It is a village carcass dumping site, adjacent to the forest.

To further check this up on captive birds I introduced old bone pieces into my vulture aviary. The vultures were not kept hungry. Soon after introducing bones, Longbilled, Whitebacked, and also the only Griffon I had came one by one and swallowed some bones, one of the birds dipping a piece into water before swallowing it. This observation on captive birds was also witnessed by Dr. Sálím Ali during his visit to the Gir two weeks later.